

Women Engaged in Church Planting Movements among the Unreached

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What is the place of women in world mission? Jesus said, “You [and the word means all of you, male and female] are my witnesses. You are the salt of the earth. You are the light of the world.” And there have been countless thousands who, without reference to where they came from or what they knew or who they were, have believed that Jesus meant exactly what he said and have set themselves to follow.

—Elisabeth Elliot¹

One of my greatest joys in life is coaching and mentoring women to effectively engage in launching movements to Christ. Yet I often see missed opportunities surrounding the role of women.

Sometimes over coffee I hear:

I felt called to the field. I came

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with a passion to labor alongside my husband. I don't want to take over. I just want to be involved! Yet my organization only makes CPM training and coaching available to men. Now that we have children I get the subtle message my only job is supporting my husband and caring for our kids.

Single women have similarly told me:

Men leave us out of strategy discussions. We don't have a lot in common with women on the team who have husbands and children, and when we talk about ministry some moms seem jealous that we have “time” for ministry.

Husbands and wives come to the field to make an impact. Yet when the wife doesn't feel she is making a real contribution, this often becomes a reason the couple leaves the field.

And the problem goes even deeper. A local colleague told me, “Please tell Western women not to come to my country if they aren't

going to make reproducing disciples. When they don't, they model disobedience to the Great Commission!”

At least 50% of most UPGs are female, and in many cultures men don't interact significantly with women. Often, especially among Muslim UPGs, women are gatekeepers for their households. Who, if not women, will seek out Women of Peace to open their oikos to the gospel? And as new movements emerge, who will equip the first-generation women leaders?

Regarding equipping missionary women I sometimes hear mission leaders say, “We don't want to burden women or make them feel guilty.” Is the best solution to not equip them for multiplication? Isn't it better to help women follow Jesus in ministry appropriate to their season of life, and prepare them to help launch a DMM/CPM?

Will the global mission community make stewardship of missionary women a priority? Will we equip missionary women with competence² and confidence to be and do all He calls us to, especially

as catalysts in launching CPMs?

My coworkers and I urge the Body of Christ to consider how to best steward missionary women. How can we support, inspire and equip them to thrive and bear multiplying fruit? How can we equip and coach women in all stages of life to multiply disciples?

Why Focus on CPM?

Kent Parks, President of Beyond, sounds the alarm: there are currently twice as many people with no access to the gospel as there were in 1980! As a percentage of world population, the unevangelized—those with no gospel access³—have increased significantly, from 24% in 1980 to 29% in 2015. This means that in raw numbers those considered unevangelized have more than doubled! In 1980 there were “only” one billion unevangelized. Today that figure has risen to 2.1 billion!⁵

Physical births currently outnumber spiritual births among the unreached. The global Church is losing ground there, both in absolute numbers and in percentage. This is unacceptable! We need to do something differently.

And we can! Since the days of Jesus and Paul, the Church has repeatedly grown much faster than population through the kind of movements we see in Acts, with women playing a key role. The 1900s offer extraordinary instances of movements in China and Korea fueled by women missionaries and spread through oppressed women.⁶ Acts-like movements today are inspiring and even starting additional movements at an unprecedented and accelerating pace. Jesus’ followers are increasingly eager to learn from experienced CPM catalysts to pursue God for CPMs. This happens through prayer and applying biblical principles and models.

In recent decades God has honored such laborers with move-

ments on every continent. David Garrison has documented CPMs in all nine “rooms” of the house of Islam⁷, and several movements are also occurring among “reached” peoples. Researchers are currently tracking more than 1,000 CPMs world-wide, each with four or more streams of four or more generations of reproducing disciples and groups.

In 1982 Donald McGavran reported that 90% of missionaries started churches by winning individuals rather than whole families. He showed that this approach actually hindered the development of movements.⁸ Yet until very recently there was little change in most missionary methods. To turn the tide reported in the research above, we must train many more of our missionaries (including women) to pursue God for movements.

What will it take for the Church to reach the unreached? It will take the full involvement of women along with men. We need a full realignment of our vision, our passions and our resources. We need a full-throttle attack on the spiritual injustice of billions living and dying without ever being invited to follow Jesus.

CPM is not a new phenomenon. Those aiming for CPMs are simply applying principles Jesus imprinted on his disciples, which Acts shows them implementing. CPM is not a magic bullet, nor is it foolproof. Pursuing a DMM/CPM is often messy, yet in recent decades these movements have brought millions of people into God’s Kingdom.

God’s Spirit is using various “models” to start CPMs today. Yet the majority of CPMs are emerging from two models: Training for Trainers (T4T) and Disciple-Making Movements (DMM—sometimes called Discovery Bible Study or DBS).⁹ At present, more female CPM trainers use the DMM approach.

Women as DMM Practitioners

All of us (men and women) are to delight in and declare God’s glory, developing intimacy with him. Out of the overflow of this intimacy we are to “be” and “do” in Christ, and seek to reproduce his life in others. Making reproducing disciples is a privilege as well as a command for all who follow him.

Being a wife and mother is one of my greatest joys and privileges. In highlighting points of engagement for women in CPMs, I don’t at all mean to suggest that women short-change their God-given roles as wives and mothers. For me, life is integrated: more like a woven tapestry than distinct compartments.

The vast majority of female missionaries with whom I interact, regardless of their stage of life, passionately want to have eternal impact. We want to do all we can to help them accomplish this.

Endnotes

1. In a speech at the Urbana 1973 mission conference: https://youtu.be/ApD_KjcdNak?t=4m23s
2. Competence means being well equipped to accomplish the vision. In this case, have female missionaries become disciplinarians who intentionally make disciples as a lifestyle pattern? Have they had the various aspects of the CPM process modeled for them? Have they learned how to train and coach female near-culture local partners?
3. “Unevangelized” is defined by the *World Christian Encyclopedia*. justinlong.org/2015/01/unreached-is-not-unevangelized-is-not-unengaged.
4. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, David Barrett, George Kurian, Todd Johnson, Eds. 2001, p. 2: 538.
5. “Christianity 2015: Religious Diversity and Personal Contact,” *International Bulletin of Missionary*

- Research* 39:1 (28-29), gordonconwell.edu/resources/documents/IBMR2015.
6. Underground Church Movements: The Surprising Role of Women's Networks by Rebecca Lewis. *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 21:4 (145-150): ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/21_4_PDFs/Role_of_Women.pdf
 7. Garrison, David. *A Wind in the House of Islam*. Published by WIGTake Resources. P.O. Box 1884, Monument, CO. 80132. ChurchPlantingMovements.com/bookstore
 8. Reprinted in the Sept/Oct 1997 issue of Mission Frontiers: <http://www.missionfrontiers.org/issue/article/a-church-in-every-people>.
 9. For an in-depth comparison and contrasts see "T4Tor DMM(DBS)?—Only God Can Start a Church-Planting Movement"—a two-part series in the Jan/Feb and May/Jun 2015 issues of Mission Frontiers.

